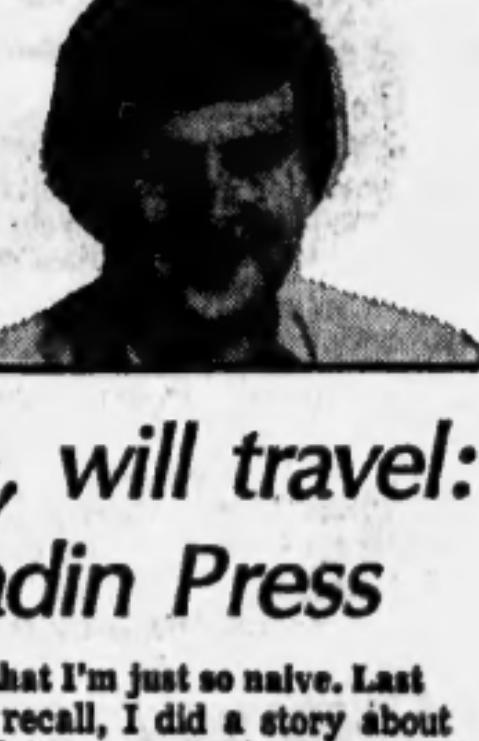


Bob Greene



Have gore, will travel: That's Paladin Press

MY PROBLEM is that I'm just so naive. Last week, you may recall, I did a story about two books called "How To Kill, Volume I," and "How To Kill, Volume II." The books were instruction manuals; they taught the reader how to murder his fellow human beings.

I expressed appropriate shock at this concept. I noted that the books were published by a firm called Paladin Press, in Boulder, Colo., and I interviewed the company's president, a fellow named Peder C. Lund. He tried to explain his rationale for selling such books.

Being a trusting sort, I assumed that the "How To Kill" books were anomalies: gruesome freaks that were exceptions to Paladin Press' regular list of titles. I imagined that they were just a way for Paladin Press to make a few extra bucks, so the company could publish other, less-lucrative books on poetry, horticulture, pet training, and other topics you usually see on the shelves of bookstores.

After the column appeared, though, a number of readers called to say: "Don't you know about Paladin Press? Haven't you heard?" When I asked them to explain, they said mere words could not do justice to what they wanted to convey; they suggested I look into it myself.

So I have obtained a catalog of all Paladin Press' books. I am astounded. Apparently we are going to have to redefine the term "pornography."

If the '70s was the decade when porn meant females displayed in gynecological poses, then the '80s may be the decade of porn Paladin Press-style. The company apparently has detected a new reading

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lust in a sub-class of Americans; it specializes in books that promise to tell its customers everything they ever wanted to know about blood, death, gore, dismemberment, cruelty, savage-heartedness — and how to become an expert at them all.

For a moment I considered not writing about Paladin Press, on the theory that doing so will only help the company sell books. But they're selling books already, so it's probably not a bad idea to let the rest of us know exactly what our fellow fans of literature are devouring these days.

What follows is a partial list of the Paladin Press books:

- "Kill Or Get Killed" — A text of instructions on "the desperately serious business of hand-to-hand fighting, which conforms to no rules of conduct . . . a must for every serious student."
- "They Shoot To Kill" — A survey of sniping incidents, which "takes readers behind the scenes of snippings both notorious and obscure. . . . There are, conservatively speaking, anywhere between 6,000 and 8,000 sniping incidents occurring yearly in the U.S."
- "Black Medicine, Volume I" — A list of the human body's vital points "where a minimum amount of force will produce a maximum impact . . . Buy now, so you will have the knowledge when you need it!"
- "Explosive Trains" — A textbook that is "the finest technical manual on explosives available. . . . Learn about the 'hot spot' theory of initiation, flash detonation, destructors, and much, much more."
- "Hi-Low Boom" — A manual "that covers approximately 200 patents, formulas, and laboratory preparations of explosives, pyrotechnics, gun powders . . . actual percentage formulas are given."
- "Sniping" — A "hard-to-find volume" that "details the lonely, dangerous life of the bush sniper, and the techniques that bring him back alive."
- "Principles of Quick Kill" — The title speaks for itself.
- "The Basic Manual of Knife Fighting" — A how-to book that presents "basic information regarding grip, stance, and technique."
- "Slash and Thrust" — A kind of graduate course in knife-fighting that "presents many little-known, more sophisticated techniques, making this the ideal selection for novice and expert alike."
- "Bloody Iron" — A book written by "ex-cons who learned their edged-weapon techniques in prison and on the streets, not through books and magazine articles."
- "Close Shaves" — Subtitled "The Complete Book of Razor Fighting."
- "The Revenge Book" — How to do it.
- "Get Even, Volume II" — Subtitled "More Dirty Tricks from the Master of Revenge."
- "Mantrapping" — Billed as "the filthiest book ever published to explain how to capture that most dangerous animal: man. . . . Reveals over a dozen different traps specifically designed to catch and kill humans."
- "Deal the First Deadly Blow" — An encyclopedia of methods providing "a total training course for the deadly arena where second place is last."
- "Below the Belt" — Includes "hundreds of illustrations showing step-by-step techniques which are not pretty but which are effective."
- "Get Tough" — Teaches the reader "how to destroy the enemy with bare hands . . . a fact-crammed manual."

So . . . you read your Emily Dickinson, and I'll read my Robert Frost. But just out of curiosity, you might glance over your shoulder to see what the guy behind you is reading. Happy dreams.

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